

Preliminary Abstract

POPULATION AND THE FUTURE IN TAIWAN

The people of Taiwan are predominantly of Chinese origin. Most of them (the group commonly referred to as "Taiwanese") are descended from migrants who arrived from the mainland of China during political upheavals in the 17th century. Their patterns as revealed in demographic indices thus provide a view of the Chinese population, reduced to manageable proportions for the keeping of public records and for analysis.

Most of the demographic records pertain to the 50 years when the island was a colonial possession of Japan. During this time, Taiwan underwent an energetic program of "economic development": agricultural production was expanded, new processing industries were formed, the marketing of farm products improved, a network of communications installed, and modern government established. But these projects were initiated and directed by Japanese, without equal participation by the local population. Thus the growth of cities, the spread of public education, and the entry of some Taiwanese into industrial and professional occupations failed to lead to any perceptible decline in fertility, because these were not parts of a general process of social change.

A notable success was achieved, however, in the field of sanitation and public health. Mortality was greatly reduced, and, with the continuance of high fertility, made possible an increase of population from 3 to 6 million. Since 1945, the Nationalist regime from the China mainland has replaced the Japanese. This shift of control brought in an unknown number of additional people, probably close to 2 million. Birth and death rates apparently are again nearly the same as during the period of Japanese rule. The economy has

become more rather than less dependent on its agriculture; opportunities for entering non-agricultural work have not increased more among Taiwanese, and very little has been added in the way of economic development outside the farming sector of the economy.

With three times as many inhabitants as there were 50 years ago, and most of the land available for farming already under cultivation, Taiwan probably cannot look forward to an indefinite period of continued growth in its population. The government has not as yet evinced any official interest in retarding the rate of increase. While, of course, health standards may decline and death rates rise, there are many indications that this would not be accepted as a satisfactory situation, as it was in the past. Thus, while a small-family pattern in Taiwan's population seems likely to appear eventually, there are as yet few signs of its beginning or ways in which it might begin, and its appearance may be without some of the accompaniments that have been associated with the process elsewhere.

George W. Barclay
Columbia University